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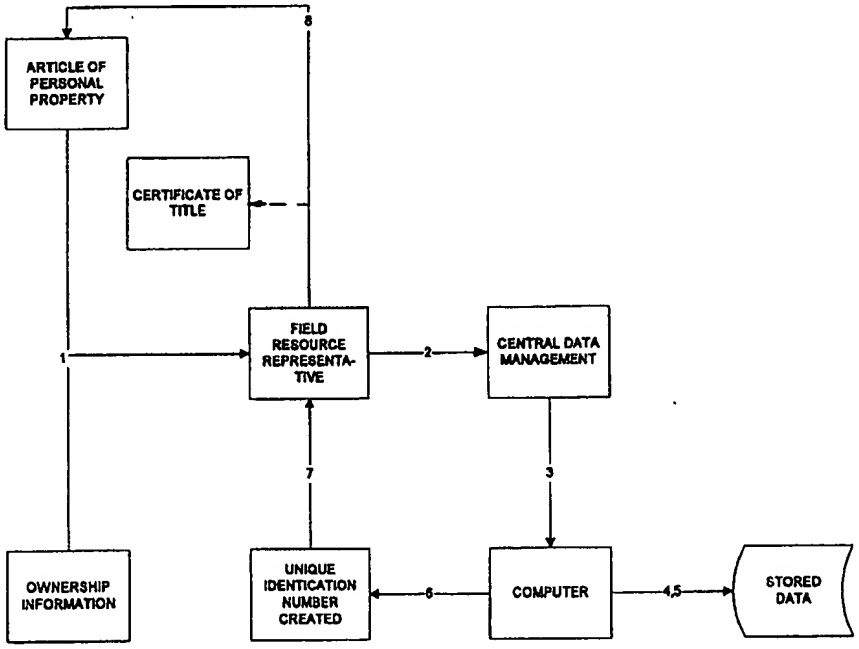
(54) Title: METHOD OF TRACKING OWNERSHIP OF PERSONAL PROPERTY

(57) Abstract

A method of tracking ownership of personal property which assigns and inscribes a unique identifying code to a particular article of personal property. Ownership information and the identifying code are stored in a database capable of being accessed over a world-wide area. In the preferred embodiment, the identifying code comprises a first code element that identifies the source of the identifying code, a second code element that identifies the date of registration, and a third code element that identifies the specific article of personal property. An optional fourth code element may be provided to identify the local field resource representative. During use, ownership information and personal property information are first inputted into the database controlled by the central data management. A unique identifying code is then assigned which is then permanently affixed to the article. If the article is lost or stolen, authorities or other citizens will recognize the first code element and contact a field resource representative or central data management to obtain ownership status. Optionally, the central data management may notify the owner or authorities of the location of the party seeking the ownership status. When the article is sold, the buyer contacts a field representative and inputs the identifying code and seller's name into the database.



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TITLE: METHOD OF TRACKING OWNERSHIP OF PERSONAL PROPERTY

TECHNICAL FIELD

A method of recording and verifying the ownership of property and, more specifically, a method of recording and verifying the ownership of portable personal property to facilitate commerce, deter theft, and facilitate recovery of lost or stolen property.

BACKGROUND ART

Although motor vehicles are registered and titled in various local or state agencies in the U.S., small portable articles of personal property, such as jewelry, cameras, or electronic devices, generally are not. This is particularly troublesome because these goods can be easily transported across county, state and national borders. Since the buyer or seller of these goods may not know who is the actual owner, theft or sale of captured lost goods is prolific.

Another problem with personal property is in its return to the actual owner when recovered. In most instances, personal information regarding the actual owner is not printed or inscribed on the personal property. Further, to affix uncoded personal identifying information to an article of property can be an invitation to invasion of privacy and further theft. Also, even if identifying mark or code were printed or inscribed on the personal property that identifies the actual owner, there is no central resource that services either the entire U.S. or world that receives and records and associates the particular article of personal property with the actual owner information.

There exists currently no resource for the recording and verification of personal property ownership, which is universally recognizable, centralized, secure, private, and globally accessible when needed. Police agencies, lost and found services and private citizens have neither the financial nor the communications resources to

laboriously seek out and contact the owners of all the lost or stolen items that come to their attention or into their possession. The vast majority of lost or stolen property recovered across the U.S. and around the world is never returned to its rightful owners. The costs associated with such losses are to be found in constantly increasing insurance premiums, increasing cost of living and the emotional costs of being victimized. Such losses are not limited to individual citizens. Vast sums of money are lost to businesses every year due to "shrinkage" and other outright thefts of company property.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the invention to provide a method of recording and associating ownership information with portable articles of personal property.

It is another object of the invention to provide such a method that securely stores the ownership information in a central location and that allows the information to be retrieved by authorized individuals over a wide area.

It is another object of the invention to provide such a method that can also be used to quickly and easily verify the ownership information of articles of personal property to promote commerce.

It is still a further object of the invention to provide such a method that can be used by authorized individuals to quickly and easily verify the ownership information of recovered lost or stolen articles or personal property.

These and other objects of the invention, which will become apparent, are met by the herein disclosed methods for securing and maintaining and relating ownership information to specific, individual articles of personal property by means of four key elements: (1) a permanent, unique identifying code for each article of property; (2) a central facility with secure database resources for maintaining records of the unique identifying code and all of the associated ownership information for each article of personal property; (3) communications means to enable appropriate inquiries to the database resource over a wide area; and (4) a service organization made up of local service field facilities to affix the identifying codes to the articles of personal property under the control of the company recording the services.

In the preferred embodiment, the identifying code comprises a first code element that specifically identifies the source of the identifying code and a second code element that identifies the date of registration, and a third code element that identifies the specific article of personal property. An optional fourth code element may be included for identifying the field resource representative involved in registering the item of personal property.

To use this method, an owner of an article of personal property makes the ownership information and the article of personal property available to a field resource representative. The field resource representative then contacts the central data management and inputs the ownership information into the central database maintained by the central data management. The central data management then creates and issues a unique identifying code to the field representative. An optional Certificate of Ownership document may also be issued to the field representative. The field resource representative permanently affixes the identifying code to the article of personal property and delivers the Certificate of Ownership document to the owner.

Should, at any time thereafter, the article of personal property be lost or stolen, the owner may contact a field source representative or the central data management directly. The owner's identity would be confirmed through the provision of private information, such as the last four digits of his or her social security number, known to the owner and included in the ownership data provided at the time the identifying code was requested. The owner would then provide the factual specifics regarding the loss or theft, such as time, location of the article when lost or stolen, and other pertinent facts. The information is inputted to the central database. The central data management system would then immediately produce notices, describing the article of personal property and the particular information regarding the loss or theft, to every police department or other constabulary authority available, within a reasonable distance of the location of the loss or theft. Further, the central data management would also program the database resource to post a notice to the public, containing a description of the article of personal property and particulars regarding the loss or theft, on a world-wide web site maintained for these purposes.

Provisions are also provided for querying the database resource regarding the

ownership status of a given property under a variety of circumstances and conditions. Means for making queries will include in-person (via a field representative), by mail, telephone, e-mail, and via the Internet web site. Police and like agencies, upon recovering stolen property may see the identifying code and seek to have a field resource representative contact the owner. Finders of lost or stolen articles of personal property may report the find and/or inquire as to the ownership status. The owner could then be contacted regarding such a report.

Persons considering the purchase of an article of property offered for sale which bear the identifying code may inquire to confirm or deny whether the person offering the item for sale is the owner of record. Should the response to such a query be that the name provided is not that of the owner, the owner would again be contacted.

Further, when an owner employing the method decides to sell or give the article of personal property to another entity, the ownership records can be updated, effectively transferring the protections and services of the method to the new owner. The owner may initiate the process by contacting either the field resource representative or the central data management and identify themselves in the same manner they would report a loss or theft. The owner would then indicate their intent to transfer title to another entity and provide the identity of the person or group to whom they are transferring ownership. Then the new owner would present themselves to the field resource representative and provide ownership information as the original owner had done. The field resource representative would then confirm the original owner's notice of intent. If the notice of intent is confirmed, the field resource representative would then process the new owner's ownership information, inputting the information to the central database and making the new owner the owner of record. The central database resource would return to the field resource representative a Certificate of Ownership document to dispense to the new owner.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a flow chart illustrating the steps of the method of registering and recording ownership information for articles of personal property.

Fig. 2 is a flow chart illustrating the steps used by a potential buyer of an article who uses the method to verify the ownership status and information of the article.

Fig. 3 is a flow chart illustrating the steps used by a finder of a lost or stolen article to obtain information regarding the ownership status and information of the article.

Fig. 4 is a flow chart illustrating the steps used by an owner to report a lost of stolen registered article to the central data management.

Fig. 5 is an illustration of the identifying code.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

As shown in the accompanying Figs. 1-5, wherein like reference number indicate like elements, there is described a novel method of tracking the ownership of an article of personal property over a wide area. The method, generally depicted in the flowchart shown in Fig. 1, tracks the ownership of personal property by assigning and imprinting a unique identifying code for the particular article of personal property. Ownership information and the identifying code are stored in a central database capable of being accessed over a wide area.

The owner of an article of personal property obtains specific, identifying information, such as a serial number, for the article and then contacts a local field resource representative. The field source representative records the owner's name, address and telephone number and the manufacturer's assigned number, such as a serial number or complete description. This information is then delivered to the central data management which services a plurality of field resource representatives located over a wide area. In the preferred embodiment, the information is inputted into a central database which associates the information and assigns a unique identifying code. The central data management then delivers the identifying code to the field resource representative then affixes the identifying code to the article.

As shown in Fig. 4, the identifying code comprises a first code element that specifically identifies the source of the identifying code, i.e, the company providing the service, and a second code element that identifies the date of

registration, and a third code element that specifically identifies the article of personal property. The identifying code may also include optional fourth code element which identifies the local field resource representative that originally registered the article.

The identifying code is sufficient size, color, and font style to be visible by an aided or unaided eye. In the embodiment shown, the first code element 10 includes three characters, (letters "WID" shown) which identify the central data management or service provider. The second code element 15 comprises a plurality of alpha-numeric characters which identify the registration date. In the embodiment shown in Fig. 5, the second code element 15 is made up of three alpha-numeric characters "A3D". The alpha-numeric character is composed of one of all possible combinations of the character of the table shown in Fig. 6.

The third code element 20 comprises at least three alpha-numeric characters, (6D4 shown) that identifies the specific article of personal property. Together, these three code elements 10, 15, 20 create a unique identifying code for the article. In the embodiment shown, the fourth code element 25 is a three alpha-numeric character letter code ("SE5") identifying the field resource representative.

After the unique identifying code is created, it is permanently affixed to the article of personal property by various methods, such as engraving, sand blasting, etching, printing, or attaching a label or plate to a surface on the article.

In Fig 2, a flowchart is shown which illustrates how the service is used by a potential buyer to verify that the seller is the actual owner of a specific article of personal property. The potential buyer first contacts a local field resource representative or central data management and presents the identifying code and the ownership information from the seller. The field resource representative then contacts and transmits the information to the central data management. The database in the central data management then processes the inputted information to determine whether the inputted information matches the information stored in the database. If the information matches, then a confirmation signal is generated and delivered to the field resource representative or directly to the buyer. If the information does not match, then a denial signal is generated and delivered to the field resource representative or to the buyer. The buyer then decides to complete or terminate the

purchase transaction based on the information.

When a registered article of personal property is lost or stolen, the owner contacts the local field source representative. The owner's identity is confirmed through the provision of private information, known to the owner and included in the ownership data provided at the time the identifying code was requested. The owner would then provide the factual specifics regarding the loss or theft, such as time, location of the article when lost or stolen, and other pertinent facts. The information is inputted to the central database. The central data management would then immediately produce notices, describing the article of personal property and the particular information regarding the loss or theft, to every police department or other constabulary authority available, within a reasonable distance of the location of the loss or theft. Further, the central data management would also program the database to post a notice to the public, containing a description of the article of personal property and particulars regarding the loss or theft, on a world-wide web site maintained for these purposes.

Provisions are also provided for querying the database regarding whether the property has been reported lost or stolen or confirmation of a specific claim to ownership of a specific article of personal property (hereinafter called "ownership status"). Means for making queries will include in-person (via a field representative), by mail, telephone, e-mail, and via the Internet web site. Police and like agencies, upon recovering stolen property may see the identifying code and request that the field resource representative contact the owner. Finders of lost or stolen articles of personal property may report the recovery and submit contact information to enable the owner to reach them. The owner could then be contacted regarding the recovery report. In Fig. 3, a flowchart is shown which more clearly illustrates how the service is used by a finder of lost or stolen registered article, such as police-person, to obtain ownership status for a specific article of personal property that has been recovered or found. The finder first obtains the identifying code from the article of personal property and then contacts the local field resource representative or the central data management. A computer in the central data management then processes the identifying code and transmits the ownership status to the field resource representative

or finder. The field resource representative or the central data management then contacts the owner.

The above method is ideally suited for use on a world-wide access, such as the Internet. The method may also be used in local area networks.

In compliance with the statute, the invention, described herein, has been described in language more or less specific as to its required steps. It should be understood, however, the invention is not limited to the specific features shown, since the means and construction shown comprised only the preferred embodiments for putting the invention into effect. The invention is, therefore, claimed in any of its forms or modifications within the legitimate and valid scope of the amended claims, appropriately interpreted in accordance with the doctrine of equivalents.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

The invention disclosed herein will have wide application in crime theft prevention industries, such as the security, police and insurance industries.

CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, comprising the following steps:

a. selecting an article of personal property;

b. obtaining ownership information for said article of personal property;

c. creating a unique identifying code which includes a first code element that identifies the source of the identifying code, a second code element that identifies the date of registration, and a third code element that uniquely identifies said article of personal property;

d. associating said ownership information with said identifying code; and,

e. affixing said identifying code to said article of personal property.

2. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 1, further including the following step, (f) inputting said ownership information and said identifying code into said computer to receive either said confirming signal or said denial signal.

3. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 1, further including the following step, (f) delivering a Certificate of Title document to the owner of said article of personal property.

4. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 1, further including the following step, (f) delivering a Bill of Sale to a subsequent owner of said article of personal property.

5. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 1, wherein said identifying code also includes a fourth code element.

6. A method tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 1, wherein said step (c) of identifying code is created in a central data management.

7. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 1, wherein said step (d) of associating of said ownership information and said identifying code is conducted in a central data management.

8. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, comprising the following steps:

a. selecting an article of personal property;

b. obtaining ownership information for said article of personal property;

c. creating a unique identifying code which includes a first code element that identifies the source of the identifying code, a second code element that identifies the date of registration, and a third code element that uniquely identifies said article of personal property;

d. associating said ownership information with said identifying code;

e. affixing said identifying code to said article of personal property;

f. inputting said ownership information and said identifying code into a processing means to receive either a confirming signal or a denial signal; and,

g. delivering a Certificate of Title document to the owner of said article of personal property.

9. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 8, further including the following step (h), delivering a Bill of Sale to a subsequent owner of said article of personal property.

10. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as

recited in Claim 9, wherein said identifying code also includes a fourth code element.

11. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, comprising the following steps:

a. selecting an article of personal property;

b. obtaining ownership information for said article of personal property;

c. collecting information regarding said article of personal property and said ownership information;

d. delivering said information regarding said article of personal property and said ownership information to a field source representative;

e. transferring said information regarding said article of personal property and said ownership information to a central data management;

f. creating a unique identifying code which includes a first code element that identifies the source of the identifying code, a second code element that identifies the date of registration, and a third code element that uniquely identifies said article of personal property; and,

g. affixing said identifying code to said article of personal property.

12. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 11, further including the following step, (f) inputting said ownership information and said identifying code into a computer located at said central data management to receive either a confirming signal or a denial signal.

13. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 12, further including the following step, (f) delivering a Certificate of Title document to the owner of said article of personal property.

14. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as

recited in Claim 13, further including the following step, delivering a Bill of Sale to a subsequent owner of said article of personal property.

15. A method of tracking ownership of personal property, as recited in Claim 14, wherein said identifying code also includes a fourth code element.

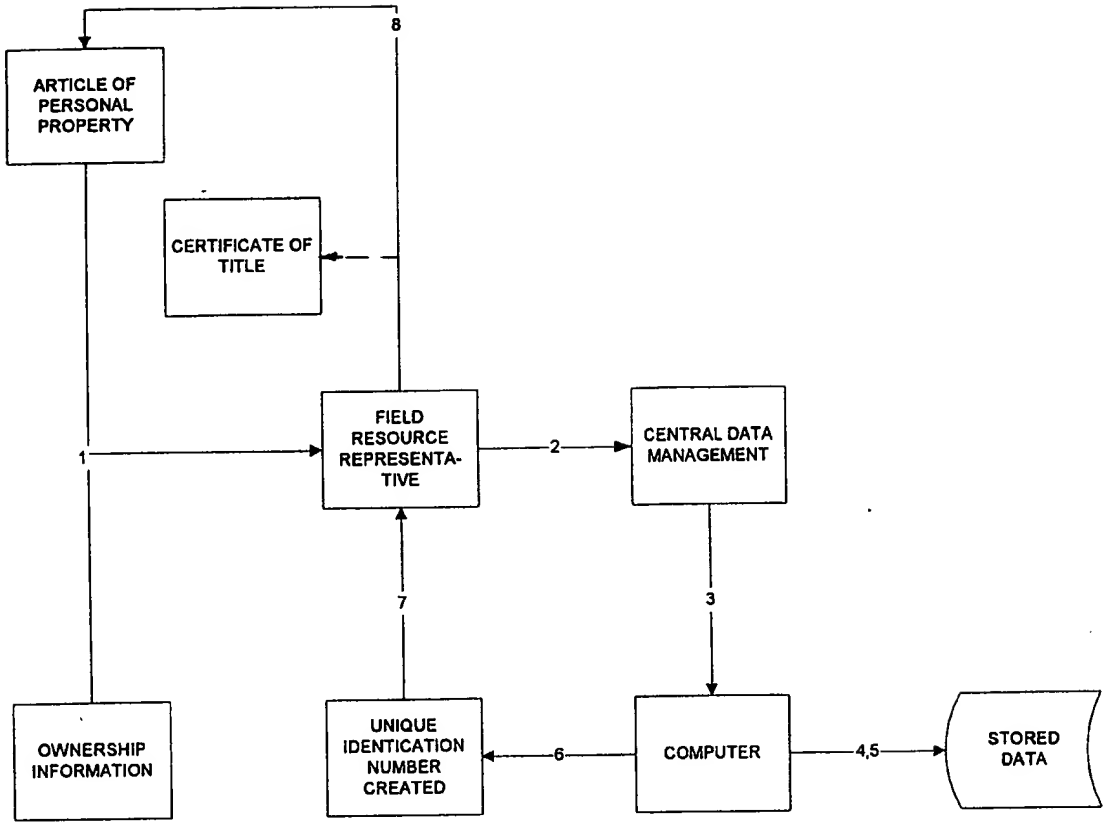

8
ARTICLE OF PERSONAL PROPERTY
CERTIFICATE OF TITLE
FIELD RESOURCE REPRESENTA-TIVE
1
2
CENTRAL DATA MANAGEMENT
7
3
OWNERSHIP INFORMATION
UNIQUE IDENTICATION NUMBER CREATED
6
COMPUTER
4,5
STORED DATA

FIG. 1

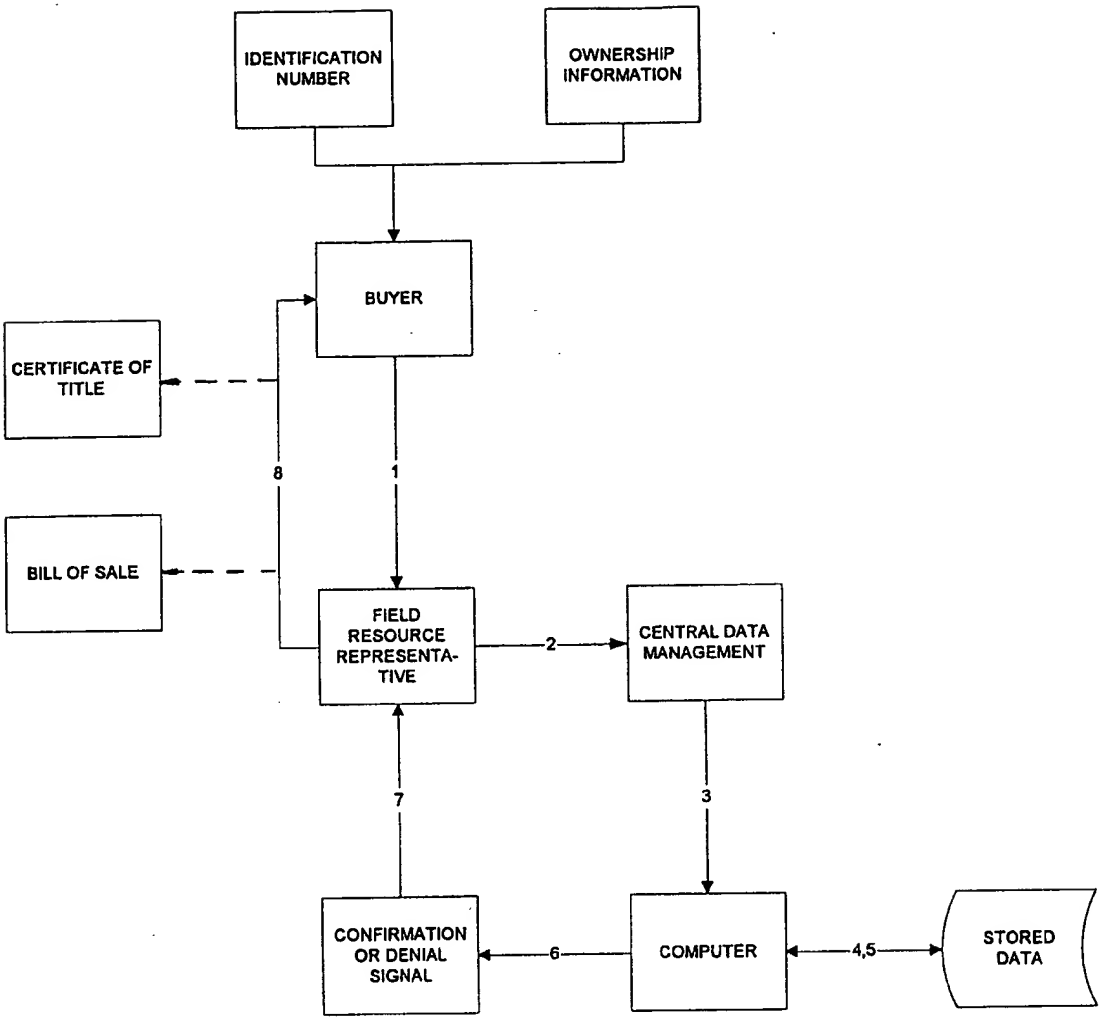

IDENTIFICATION NUMBER
OWNERSHIP INFORMATION
BUYER
CERTIFICATE OF TITLE
BILL OF SALE
8
1
FIELD RESOURCE REPRESENTA-TIVE
2
CENTRAL DATA MANAGEMENT
7
3
CONFIRMATION OR DENIAL SIGNAL
6
COMPUTER
4,5
STORED DATA

FIG. 2

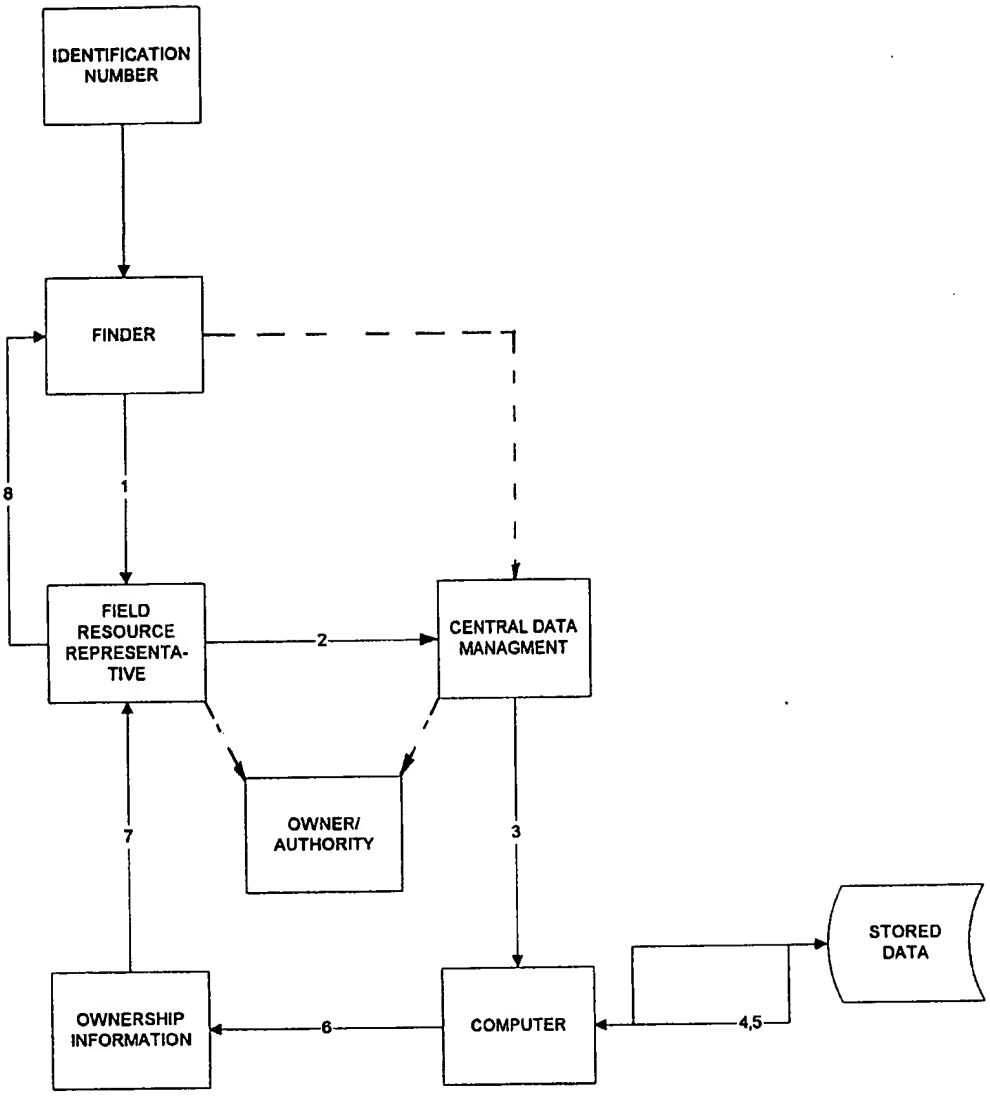
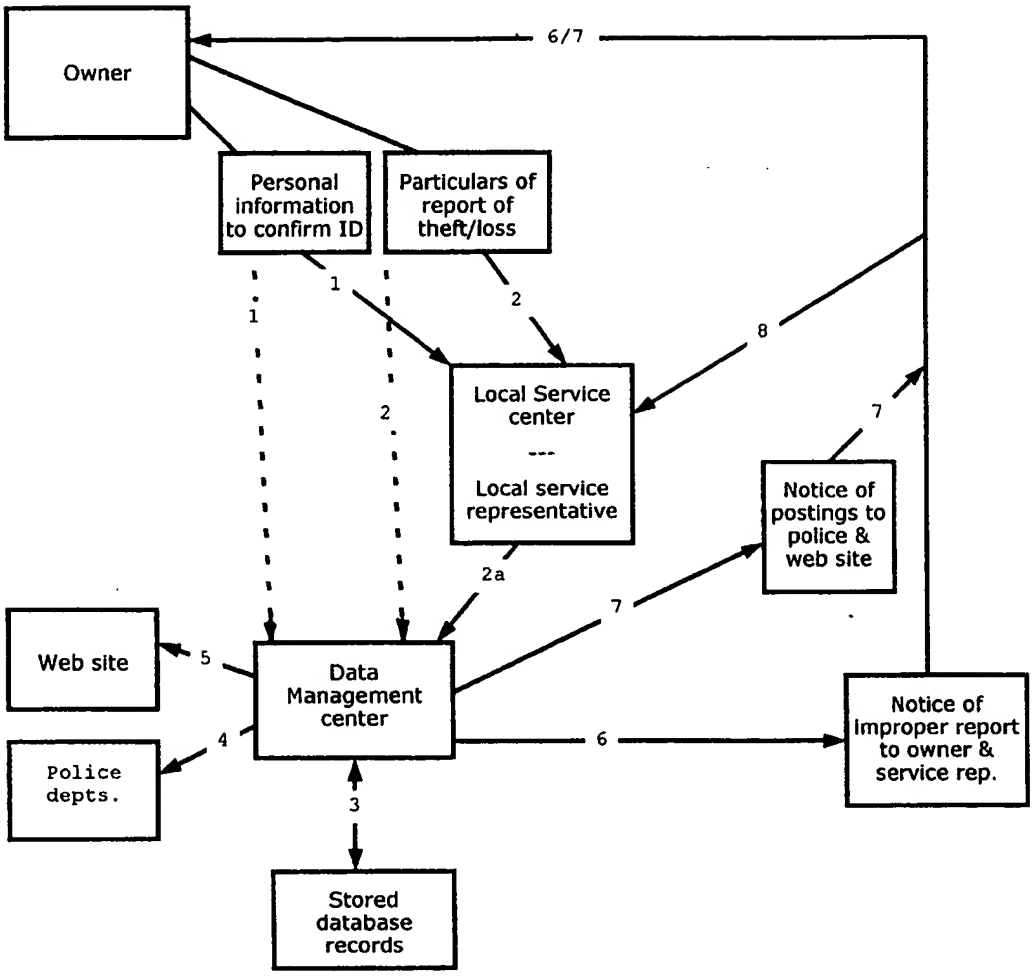

IDENTIFICATION NUMBER
FINDER
8
1
FIELD RESOURCE REPRESENTA-TIVE
2
CENTRAL DATA MANAGMENT
OWNER/ AUTHORITY
7
3
STORED DATA
OWNERSHIP INFORMATION
6
COMPUTER
4,5

FIG. 3


Owner
6/7
Personal information to confirm ID
Particulars of report of theft/loss
1
2
1
2
8
Local Service center

Local service representative
7
Notice of postings to police & web site
2a
7
Web site
5
Data Management center
Notice of Improper report to owner & service rep.
4
6
Police depts.
3
Stored database records

FIG. 4

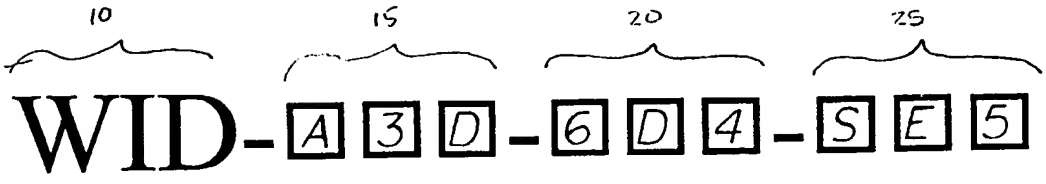


FIG. 5

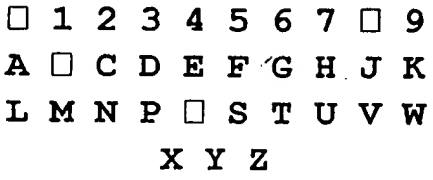


FIG. 6